

# LINCOLN LORE

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## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO LINCOLN'S RENOWN

### 2. Intellectual Processes\*

An editor writing twenty-five years ago concluded: "Lincoln was first and foremost the clear, precise, honest thinker. . . . Had he been less than that history could never have enshrined him, despite his countless human qualities, among the world's immortals." This testimonial about the significance of Lincoln's "Intellectual Processes" gives emphasis to this second monograph in the series on "Factors Contributing to Lincoln's Renown." Rather than select from Lincoln's own writings excerpts which would reveal his mental development, statements about him by men qualified to speak with some authority in this field predominate.

President Elliot of Harvard University fame once stated that Lincoln was "a truly educated man, the kind of man that the American universities as yet have not been able to produce."

#### CAPACITY FOR LEARNING

The most singular thing about the wonderful career of the man is the way in which he steadily grew into national stature. . . . Everything formed, informed, transformed him. The process was slow but unbroken. He was not fit to be President until he actually became President. He was fit then because, learning everything as he went, he had found out how much there was to learn, and had still an infinite capacity for learning. . . . But Lincoln was always a-making; he would have died unfinished if the terrible storms of the war had not stung him to learn in those four years what no other twenty could have taught him.—Woodrow Wilson.

Lincoln was of slow growth. There was nothing precocious about him. He matured along fine lines and each year added to his mental stature. . . . He towered high among the cultured, the statesmen, and all the gifted geniuses of the country, in both ideas and expression.—Chauncey M. Depew.

No doubt his growth upward was largely due to his presidential culture and pruning, and there was a greater man at its close than at its beginning. And, when we speak of him as great, we mean great in the general impressive sense. There is a greatness of pure intellect, of pure force, independent of circumstances like some tall memorial shaft sprung up from the earth to the sky. He is the great American of his age.—John D. Long.

#### DELIBERATION

The habits of his mind were those of meditation and inward thought. . . . He excelled in logical statement. . . . He reasoned clearly, his reflective judgment was good and his purposes were fixed. . . . He was skillful in analysis, discerned with precision the central idea on which a question turned and knew how to disengage it and present it by itself in a few homely, strong old English words that would be intelligible to all.—George Bancroft.

I want very much to know, Mr. Lincoln, how you got this unusual power of "putting things." It must have been a matter of education. No man has it by nature alone. What has your education been?

"When a mere child, I used to get irritated when anybody talked to me in a way I could not understand.

. . . Trying to make out what was the exact meaning of some of their, to me, dark sayings I could not sleep, though I often tried to, when I got on such a hunt after an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over, until I had put it in language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend. . . . I am never easy now, when I am handling a thought, till I have bounded it north and bounded it south, and bounded it east, and bounded it west."

Mr. Lincoln, I thank you for this. It is the most splendid educational fact I ever happened upon.—John Putnam Gulliver.

#### RHETORIC

In analyzing Lincoln's characteristics as a speaker, one is impressed with the completeness of his equipment. He possessed two things that are absolutely essential to effective speaking—namely information and earnestness. If one can be called eloquent who knows what he is talking about and means what he says—and I know of no better definition—Lincoln's speeches were eloquent. . . . In addition to these essentials, Lincoln possessed what may be called the secondary aid to oratory. He was a master of statement. Few have equalled his ability to strip a truth of surplus verbiage and present it in its native strength.—William Jennings Bryan.

The character and ideas of a statesman are best studied through his own words. This is particularly true of Lincoln. . . . His speeches need to be studied in close relation to the occasions which called them forth. They are not philosophical lucubrations or brilliant displays of rhetoric. They are a part of his life. They are the expressions of his convictions. Few great men stand out so clearly revealed by their words, whether spoken or written as he does.—James Bryce.

#### LOGIC

Lincoln was an expert logician. He brought to bear upon his opponents the batteries of remorseless logic. But he thought honestly and scorned the tricks of sophistry. He had a profound confidence in the reasoning judgment of the American people. He disdained all efforts to capture the populace by other means, or to employ his great talents in other than fair disputation. He treated opposing argument with an extraordinary power of analysis. He eviscerated the subject of discussion and laid it bare. He presented not abuse, not appeal to the emotions of the multitude, but cogent reasoning, and thus appeared before the American people representing their ideal of straightforward, honest representation of the truth, applicable to their crisis. Loyalty was commanded because reason exerted its sway.—Charles Evans Hughes.

He stood forth the one man of his time whose intellectual vision accurately sized up the crisis; the one man whose painstaking, honest logic brought the crisis, in all its inevitability, within the comprehension of the people, the one man who had found clear ground on which, at one and the same time, to stand for the right and for the law.—Peter Stenger Grosscup.

\*Note: See *Lincoln Lore* 1333.